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ABSTRACT

This Project Brief focuses on the Ford Foundation's Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), which aims to help selected community colleges in distressed communities expand their capacity to increase access to postsecondary education and to foster regional economic development. RCCI is geared to specific geographic regions where communities face out-migration and stagnant or declining communities--the Southeast, Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations. Included in this brief are a list of the 24 RCCI colleges, a description of RCCI's approach to team-building, and factors affecting team practice. These factors include: (1) durability; (2) people development; (3) teamwork; (4) communication; (5) planning functions; (6) systems thinking for change; (7) sustainability; and (8) innovation. Also listed are "lessons learned" in the development of strategies at different colleges: (1) valuing a team approach; (2) clarity of mission; (3) diversity of composition; (4) understanding institutional and community contexts; (5) ownership of processes and outcomes; (6) leadership; (7) experiential learning; and (8) connection to the academic core. RCCI pilot college teams fall into two general categories: college-based and community-based. Although approaches vary, they share the common principals of leadership, team composition, and organizational process. Finally, the brief includes guidelines for effective teams. Contains 18 references. (AS)

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# Rural Community College Initiative III
# Building Teams for Institutional and Community Change
# AACC Project Brief
# AACC-PB-99-1

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AACC PROJECT BRIEF

AACC-PB-99-1

RURAL TEAM BUILDING

# RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE
## III. BUILDING TEAMS FOR INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE

*Ronald Eller, Rubén Martinez, Cynthia Pace, Michael Pavel, and Lynn Barnett*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Focusing on community colleges in distressed rural areas of the United States, the Ford Foundation's Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) aims to help targeted community colleges expand their capacity to increase access to postsecondary education and to foster regional economic development. RCCI is geared to specific geographic regions where communities face out-migration and stagnant or declining economies—the Southeast, Black Belt/Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations. Central to the RCCI goals is the idea that a broad-based team is the best vehicle to lead efforts at the college and in the community, and that teams should include a diversity of positions, perspectives, interests, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. A national demonstration program began in 1995 with nine RCCI pilot colleges that received funding from the Foundation, along with technical assistance from MDC, Inc., a nonprofit organization specializing in workforce and economic development.

The RCCI pilot college teams generally fall into two categories: *college-based* and *community-based*. Although approaches vary, they share some common principles of leadership, team composition, and organizational process. Among the factors found most to affect team effectiveness are: durability, people development, teamwork, communications, planning functions, systems thinking for change, sustainability, and innovation. Differences in college and community contexts, presidential leadership styles, and local goals contributed to the evolution of different models of team organization and function. Although no single model fits the needs of all college and community teams, several practices appear to help stimulate institutional and community change.

### *Effective Approaches to RCCI Team Building*

- Valuing a team approach
- Clarity of team mission
- Diversity in team composition
- Understanding institutional and community contexts
- Ownership of team processes and outcomes
- Presidential leadership
- Attention to experiential learning
- Connection to the academic core.

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# RCCI Colleges

Alabama Southern Community College, Monroeville, AL*

Blackfeet Community College, Browning, MT

Coahoma Community College, Clarksdale, MS*

Danville Community College, Danville, VA

Fort Belknap College, Harlem, MT*

Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, MT*

Hazard Community College, Hazard, KY*

Laredo Community College, Laredo, TX

Meridian Community College, Meridian, MS

Mountain Empire Community College, Big Stone Gap, VA

New Mexico State University – Carlsbad, Carlsbad, NM

Northern New Mexico Community College, Espanola, NM*

Phillips Community College, Helena, AR

Prestonsburg Community College, Prestonsburg, KY

Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT*

Sinte Gleska University, Rosebud, SD

Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, ND

Somerset Community College, Somerset, KY

Southeast Community College, Cumberland, KY*

Southeastern Community College, Whiteville, NC

Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde, TX*

Technical College of the Lowcountry, Beaufort, SC

University of New Mexico – Gallup, Gallup, NM

Wallace Community College, Selma, AL

** Pilot colleges studied for this report.*

*This AACC Project Brief, the third in a series, is based on a research report prepared by the Rural Community College Initiative Documentation and Assessment Team: Ronald Eller, director, Appalachia Center, University of Kentucky; Rubén Martinez, associate provost, University of Southern Colorado; Cynthia Pace, founder/senior partner, PACEMAKERS; Michael Pavel, assistant professor, Washington State University, Hector Garza, vice president, Access and Equity Programs, American Council on Education; and Lynn Barnett, director, Academic, Student, and Community Development, American Association of Community Colleges. Findings in this Brief are based on the experiences of nine RCCI pilot colleges, drawn from information gathered through campus visits, survey instruments, focus group and individual interviews, campus reports, observations of workshops and team meetings over a four-year period, and analysis of the literature on successful team building.*



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# RCCI

## The Rural Community College Initiative

The Ford Foundation began the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) in 1993 to help community colleges in distressed communities in targeted rural areas of the United States—the Southeast, Black Belt/Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations. The Foundation and its managing partner, MDC, Inc., encourage the colleges to establish sustainable programs that will foster regional economic development and improve access to postsecondary education for traditionally underserved and disadvantaged populations. They have adopted a team-building approach as a strategy for both institutional and community change.

## RCCI and Team Building

Central to RCCI is the idea that a broad-based team—composed of college administration and faculty along with representatives of local business, government, public schools, and community-based organizations—is the best vehicle to lead RCCI efforts at the college and in the community (MDC, Inc., 1998). This means teams that include a diversity of positions, perspectives, interests, and racial/ethnic backgrounds that will open new avenues for collaboration and deploy multiple talents. Teams play significant roles in planning, overseeing implementation, and helping programs achieve sustainability. The 24 participating colleges are encouraged to create a core team of individuals that can lead visioning and planning processes and implement specific projects. Combined with strong presidential commitment, a team-led approach is viewed as the best strategy for achieving the twin RCCI goals of economic development and expanding access to postsecondary education.

They have adopted a team-building approach as a strategy for both institutional and community change.

## RCCI Team-Building Models

The RCCI campus teams do not all look alike. Different team structures and functions result in part from different styles of presidential leadership, institutional histories, and community contexts. Pilot college teams generally fall into two categories, *college-based* or *community-based*. College-based teams have primarily college administrators, staff, and faculty as members. Community-based teams have a majority of non-college members representing diverse backgrounds and interests. These teams tend to reflect two separate approaches: those with a mainly local membership and program focus, and those with a regional or multi-county composition and focus.

Different styles of leadership, communication, and group dynamics characterize each team. Some operate at the personal direction of the college president; others have developed a strong secondary tier of leadership that functions with less presidential involvement but with the president's confidence. During the pilot phase of RCCI, team leadership fell on a continuum ranging from traditional hierarchical approaches to participatory processes for group consensus building.

Each team has experienced some success in achieving the original RCCI goals defined by the team through a "Vision to Action" process. Most have emphasized program and structural changes within the institution that facilitate responses to community needs. A few have focused more on social change by developing projects that address specific local economic or community development problems. The most successful campuses have found ways to combine institutional change strategies with community-based efforts that build capacity for economic growth.



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...“the work of institutional and community change requires a critical mass of innovators . . . who can spread their enthusiasm and energy outward to the college and the community”

The diverse team composition and organizational styles among the nine pilot RCCI colleges reflect the many different contexts from which the teams emerged and continue to function. Common to all, however, is the notion that “the work of institutional and community change requires a critical mass of innovators . . . who can spread their enthusiasm and energy outward to the college and the community” (MDC, Inc., 1998). These innovators work in different ways, but their collective experiences suggest a road map for other rural communities.

# Approaches to Team Building

Distinct differences in leadership, composition, and organizational processes emerged in the nine RCCI pilot colleges from the beginning and expanded over each team’s life cycle. Despite these differences, some common factors affected each of the team-building efforts: leadership, team composition, and organizational processes.

## Leadership

RCCI teams have a team leader (usually a dean, faculty member, or other college administrator) who is selected by the president. Some also have an RCCI coordinator to manage day-to-day operations. Effective leaders articulate and maintain a team’s vision, create an environment that values quality and supports creativity, and link team goals to the college mission and community needs. RCCI teams depended not only on presidential leadership but also on second-tier leadership.

RCCI teams depended not only on presidential leadership but also on second-tier leadership.

College presidents can make an environment that values the team’s work as an institutional priority. Effective presidential leadership can move it forward—from project status to part of a long-term process for change. At every campus, team members cited the president’s personal involvement or support as a requirement for success. Some presidents assumed an active personal role in guiding team activities, often using community consultants and delegating responsibilities to faculty, mid-level administrators, or project managers within the college. Other presidents were actively involved on the teams, but assumed a more subtle, participatory style that supported and encouraged the team. Regardless of the approach taken, the presidents defined clearly the team’s mission and aligned it with institutional resources and structures. In both directive and participatory leadership styles, it was important for the president to maintain a high level of visibility with the project and open communication with team members. Teams with a participatory presidential leadership style tended to emphasize community-based projects. On the most successful teams, active presidential involvement helped create a confident atmosphere in which team members were willing to take risks and consider long-range strategies for change.

Teams that model diversity enjoy a broader range of perspectives for planning and implementation.

Successful teams developed strong second-tier leadership through team leaders and coordinators. They not only managed meeting logistics but also helped maintain the team’s collective vision, kept members focused on desired outcomes, and sustained its energy and commitment over time. On highly participatory teams, coordinators played a critical role in maintaining the trust and involvement of faculty and community leaders, mediating occasional conflicts, clarifying areas of responsibility, and assuring open and inclusive discussion. On more directive teams, second-tier leaders often assumed primary managerial responsibilities for project activities and outcomes. In either case, secondary leaders had the trust and confidence of the president and the skill to work within both college and community cultures.



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### *Team Building in RCCI Expansion*

***When the Ford Foundation prepared to expand the Rural Community College Initiative in 1996, it was more prescriptive about team membership. The application for second-round grants asked colleges to identify and commit to a "core team," a management team comprising two college and two community representatives. The first job for colleges at the implementation stage was to broaden membership from the core management team, adding members to the "expansion team." Colleges were encouraged to seek additional community and college members, including faculty, to ensure broad-based representation.***

***MDC, responsible for technical assistance to the colleges, revised the Vision to Action process and made changes in RCCI training institutes, emphasizing the community/college team approach. Leadership institutes focused on team and process skills, along with training in specific content areas such as economic, community, and human resource development. Additional training materials were developed for team orientation and program planning.***

## Team Composition

Teams that model diversity enjoy a broader range of perspectives for planning and implementation, and successful teams include members with diverse viewpoints. Although mid-level administrators were predominant on college-based teams, they also included a mix of faculty and staff as well as business and other community representatives. These teams usually concentrated on changing internal educational strategies (e.g., curricula, educational technology, or student developmental skills), and key administrators on the team helped meet team goals. In some cases, staff and faculty team members provided important links to additional institutional and external resources and extended activities to the larger community. Multidisciplinary college-based teams benefited from a broad spectrum of interests across the campus.

Community-based teams reflected a variety of interests within the community, including business, government, and secondary and higher education. Although the key team leadership positions were usually connected with the college, team projects tended to focus on community needs rather than on core campus programs. The most successful community-based teams brought together diverse elements of the community (primarily professionals) and opened a dialogue across traditional lines of gender, race, and class. Depending upon how the college defined its service area at the outset of RCCI planning, community-based teams comprised either local individuals or key regional leaders, and activities reflected this composition.

RCCI team composition tended to evolve over time as goals crystallized, institutional and community weaknesses were identified, and college leadership changed. Although some remained constant, most campuses experienced fluidity in team membership. It was not uncommon for new team members to be added as new projects and needs were identified, or for the team to be expanded by subcommittees for new activities. Sometimes a small core team remained while the larger team became occasional advisors. The most successful teams defined RCCI as a "process" rather than a list of specific "projects," and as the process expanded, both team composition and diversity grew as well.

## Organizational Processes

Although RCCI teams differ dramatically in organizational structure depending upon leadership style, composition, and local culture, they share an appreciation for collaboration, open dialogue, interaction, and college–community partnerships. Even on more hierarchical teams, team members felt that the decision-making process was collaborative and that each person's opinion was valued. On less hierarchical teams, both faculty and community team members felt a sense of empowerment and ownership that translated into greater energy and commitment. Especially on the community-based teams, the RCCI collaborative process provided a fresh alternative to traditional approaches to local decision-making.

...most campuses experienced fluidity in team membership.

Not surprisingly, college-based teams tended to follow formal lines of communication, group interaction, and delegation. Community-based teams relied more on informal communication and interpersonal leadership skills to persuade members to assume responsibility for specific outcomes. Some RCCI leaders recognized traditional cultural differences among members and deliberately avoided imposing an "academic" style on the team. Some campuses minimized team meetings, convening as needs arose. Others met monthly, with



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[Teams], share an appreciation for collaboration, open dialogue, interaction, and college-community partnerships.

meetings regularly lasting two or three hours, including dinner and much informal conversation. Highly collaborative teams found a variety of informal ways to build a sense of community among members, including field trips, retreats, and group attendance at RCCI institutes. Whatever the differences in organizational approach or styles of interactive behavior, successful RCCI teams appear to value a collaborative approach to institutional and community change.

# Factors Affecting Team Practice

As in any collaborative effort, building quality teams depends not only upon leadership, composition, and organizational procedures, but also upon a number of other factors. In the RCCI experience, they include: durability, people development, teamwork, communications, planning functions, systems thinking/change, sustainability, and innovation.

## Durability

Altering structures and behaviors of institutions and communities is challenging, especially in persistently distressed areas where resources for change are limited and tradition sometimes inhibits innovation. Perseverance and flexibility are key to long-term success. Teams must overcome unexpected challenges, respond to new opportunities, and learn from experience. In a long-term initiative such as RCCI that seeks to build institutional capacity, continuity and stability are important for success. Changes in leadership at the top can make it difficult for efforts to stay focused on goals and strategies, and changes in secondary leadership can inhibit team coordination and action. While team membership may evolve over time, continuous leadership and a persistent core membership seem to help maintain coherence, enthusiasm, and focus. This means that selection of team members and leaders is critical. A team must have diversity for breadth of knowledge and skills, and its members must be committed not only to the philosophy and goals of the initiative but also to risk-taking to meet those goals. Successful teams develop early a clear understanding of their mission and goals, review their strategies continuously, and distribute responsibility among their members.

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## People Development

Developing the human and social capacities of rural institutions and their communities is a core RCCI goal. The ability of team members to work with others, overcome conflict, and think beyond individual interests has helped expand their community's social capacity—the ability to organize, engage in public talk, and make public decisions. These skills are often weak in distressed rural areas. Participation in RCCI workshops and retreats helped team members better understand institutional and community issues and were especially valuable for people who had been traditionally excluded from decision-making processes. Almost all of the RCCI teams found that workshops and visits to other campuses broadened their understanding of their own community, gave them new ideas, and allowed them to put their own strategies into comparative perspective.

... workshops and visits to other campuses broadened their understanding ...



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## Teamwork

Effective teamwork is a learned process, facilitated in RCCI by structured training and retreats but shaped by group experiences and the cultural norms of diverse communities. By encouraging the creation of broad-based teams, RCCI recognizes the cultural diversity of rural communities. While teamwork processes may differ in each context, they must include an understanding and sensitivity to diverse styles of communication, ways of thinking, and delegating work. On several RCCI teams informal persuasion and reciprocity were woven into team dynamics. Some of the RCCI teams found that retreats and institutes were effective means of creating community and promoting teamwork. Others did not, preferring the open and informal exchange of information that occurred at such events through the collective process of "storytelling." These informal exchanges of information—more consistent with traditional rural cultures than formal presentations—helped stimulate learning and generated respect for diversity and pride in their own team.

... processes must include an understanding and sensitivity to diverse styles of communication, ways of thinking, and delegating work.

## Communication

Cultural differences characterize team approaches to communication. Successful RCCI teams developed both formal and informal means of communication that helped integrate the college, community businesses and organizations, and the local culture. Some teams encouraged informal exchanges of ideas not only during meetings but also outside them, sometimes reaching consensus before a meeting was called. Others followed more formal patterns of group discussion—often at meetings that included an informal social period—where consensus was achieved by presenting ideas and airing diverse perspectives.

While informal patterns of communication were critical for creating a functional team, formal approaches were also important. Newsletters, meeting and project reports, and brochures helped members stay abreast of program development. Some teams used technology through e-mail, listservs, and special Web sites to share information. The development of formal and informal approaches to communication was often the key to keeping a diverse team active, committed, and growing. One challenge in creating college–community teams was the tension between the analytical approach of academics and the action-oriented approach of community members. Care must be taken to orient team members to the different approaches to dialogue in order for team members to understand each other better and to promote more effective communication.

Successful RCCI teams developed both formal and informal means of communication.

## Planning Functions

A participatory and reflective planning process allows a team to assess community strengths and weaknesses and to envision strategies for change. All of the RCCI colleges participated in a Vision to Action strategic planning process that helped to define later implementation activities. Some teams incorporated the RCCI approach to strategic planning across the entire campus, examining the relationship of the curriculum and institutional programs to access and economic development. Others continually expanded RCCI team membership to include previously untapped community resources or uninvolved geographic service areas. In any case, successful teams see planning as an ongoing process that includes regular measurement of progress, information gathering, assessment of new conditions, and team expansion as needs change.



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## Systems Thinking for Change

Collaboration across cultures and functions requires a broad understanding of decision-making processes and organizational structures. The RCCI experience is showing that strategies for change must integrate diverse sectors of the college and the community and that key leaders must support them. Successful teams have broad-based participation, effective communication, and an expansive planning process to assure the integration of objectives with existing policies and practices. They also are sensitive to diverse leadership styles and the interdependence of various components of the system. Leaders, staff, and program managers accept change at different rates, and innovation in one part of a system often has consequences for another. The ability to see institutional and community "systems" as a whole is essential for sustainable change. Successful teams are able to maintain a systems approach to planning and implementation that builds upon interrelationships, promotes institutional change, and connects specific project outcomes with the larger goals of the team.

The ability to see institutional and community "systems" as a whole is essential for sustainable change.

## Sustainability

Sustaining an initiative such as RCCI requires systems thinking, effective leadership, and the resources to maintain the planning process after external funds are gone. It helps when teams can integrate their work across the college and the community. Some campuses have done this by restructuring existing programs and departments in ways that consolidate old and new programs and provide a foundation for expansion into other areas.

Successful teams demonstrate the courage to think innovatively and creatively, ... committed to increasingly higher standards of performance.

## Innovation

Successful teams demonstrate the courage to think innovatively and creatively. Not content to accept things the way they are or to retreat from challenges, effective teams are creative enough to think beyond the status quo and to set higher goals. They are committed to increasingly higher standards of performance. They are quick to learn from other institutions, but are interested in doing it better. Despite limited resources, they are willing to take measured risks that propel the college and the community into unfamiliar terrain. Just as they value and promote entrepreneurship and collaboration for their communities and collaboration, successful teams are entrepreneurial and collaborative.

# Lessons Learned

Culture, history, and contemporary context influence any college's potential for innovative and strategic approaches to change. The RCCI experience has produced many strategies for improving access and economic development, each influenced by the character of the teams and differences in contexts, leadership styles, and local goals. No single model fits the needs of all colleges and communities, and each model contains the potential to facilitate different levels of change. Considered together, however, the RCCI models provide insight into the practices that promote the building of quality teams for institutional improvement and community change everywhere. Effective approaches take into account values, mission, representation, local context, ways people lead and learn, and relationship to the college.



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## Valuing a Team Approach

Depending upon the composition and structure of the team, RCCI pilot colleges developed teams that generally fell along a continuum from college-based to community-based models, focusing their efforts on institutional reform or community services. Regardless of structure, the quality of team leadership, clarity of goals, and presidential participation were as likely to determine success as any organizational model. In all cases, it was the acceptance of the idea of collaboration and the commitment to a team approach to program management that created an environment for innovation and change. RCCI pilot colleges valued the diversity of perspectives and talents that a team approach brings to an initiative and recognized the need to encourage a "culture of cooperation." Team building came to mean something more than just a method for program delivery.

... the quality of team leadership, clarity of goals, and presidential participation were as likely to determine success as any organizational model.

## Clarity of Team Mission

Successful team building requires special attention to the team's mission and goals at the outset and reinforces that mission throughout the planning and implementation process. Poorly defined goals lead to confusion and frustration throughout the team building process and limit the potential for change. Program leaders must clarify the nature of their expectations and identify benchmarks to measure transformation. Since language and culture are important to team dynamics, members must agree to definitions of critical terms like *community, economic development, access, team,* or *change*. They must not only think creatively within their current context but also understand how institutions and communities change.

Since language and culture are important to team dynamics, members must agree to definitions of critical terms ...

## Diversity in Team Composition

Teams that include a mix of people bring together talents, information, and resources that strengthen the potential for successful change efforts. Since a team's decisions can have wide-ranging repercussions, it will benefit from having broad-based membership that can gather support for change. College-based teams, for example, which tend to focus on college-centered change, need to include faculty, staff, and administrators from across the campus in order to enhance credibility, facilitate coordination, and improve working relationships among diverse sectors. To avoid tunnel vision, they should garner input from students and community members. Diversity on community-based teams broadens the base of knowledge about the community and about critical community needs and provides a framework for building bridges between the college and the community. A community-based team assures greater probability that outcomes will be community-centered. Racial, gender, and class diversity within the team assures that a variety of community perspectives will be represented in the decision-making process. When a team reflects the diversity of its community, the team enhances the community's civic capacity—crucial for overcoming historic divisiveness and mistrust that have prevented growth in the past.

Racial, gender, and class diversity within the team assures that a variety of community perspectives will be represented in the decision-making process.

## Understanding Institutional and Community Contexts

Diverse cultural and historical experiences make it difficult if not impossible to identify universal strategies for institutional and community change in rural areas of the country.



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Each RCCI pilot college was shaped by its own particular personality; each community, by a different set of cultural norms, social systems, and economic history. Understanding these contexts is crucial. Some community colleges located in rural growth centers see themselves as expanding regional institutions that provide opportunities for higher education to a number of distant communities. Others perceive their role as providing access to higher education for a specific rural community. Building effective teams requires an ongoing knowledge of an institution's assets, weaknesses, and service area. Sustainable change in rural communities begins with an understanding of the local context and culture.

Sustainable change in rural communities begins with an understanding of the local context and culture... [including] valuing informal communication that builds upon traditional behaviors and customs.

Many rural communities have long established behaviors for achieving common goals. Others have little experience with civic cooperation or strategic planning. In both, there is often a deep suspicion of formal institutions and efforts organized by "outsiders" to address community problems. Building diverse teams with the authority to design and administer programs is a major step toward building new levels of trust. Creating a network of local or regional leaders that share common knowledge and experiences builds a foundation for cooperation in other areas and fosters trust across traditional social divisions. The creation of a team "process" requires valuing informal communication that builds upon traditional behaviors and customs. Workshops and visits to other campuses broaden the local understanding of their own community and institutional contexts while nurturing new ideas for change.

## Ownership of Team Processes and Outcomes

Building a culture of cooperation and trust requires that teams assume ownership of the initiative and that college presidents and team leaders adopt participatory decision-making. The commitment of team members is related to the amount of decision-making authority they are given. In effective teams, individual team members assume responsibility for specific project outcomes collectively feel that they are empowered to take the risks necessary to affect change. While the clear support and participation of college leaders is critical, leaders must be comfortable transferring authority and responsibility to the team. This means that institutional leaders also must take risks and place their confidence in participatory decision-making.

## Leadership

Just as a sense of ownership is important to building effective teams, leadership often is the key to team dynamics. In addition to helping establish the team's mission, a president's participation on the team sends a message about the initiative's priority within the college. In some cultural contexts, presidential leadership is a major factor in the team's ability to foster teamwork and be productive. In others, it is more important for the president to be a supportive member of the team. In all cases, the college president must support the initiative publicly, provide direction to the team, and promote a supportive environment for the team to accomplish its tasks. Secondary leadership is just as essential. Teams should include key decision-makers on campus and in the community who can move the work forward. Next to the president, an effective team coordinator is essential to providing leadership and continuity. Besides fundamental leadership and management skills, effective team coordinators have the trust of the president, the respect of team members, personal commitment, a knowledge of the community, and excellent communication skills.

... institutional leaders also must take risks and place their confidence in participatory decision-making.



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## Attention to Experiential Learning

The value of experiential learning cannot be understated in team development. Group discussion, field trips, storytelling and other forms of active learning often contribute to team knowledge and creative thinking. This is especially true among rural people whose cultures emphasize participatory learning and informal styles of communication. While formal presentations, videos, and printed materials are useful, among the experiences most valued by RCCI teams were those that included interaction with teams from other areas, travel to unfamiliar locations, visits to model programs, and informal exchanges with counterparts. Such opportunities also helped bridge language and decision-making gaps between academic and nonacademic cultures.

At the heart of successful team building for institutional and community change is the integration of the team's mission with the central mission of the college.

## Connection to the Academic Core

Successful RCCI teams strongly connect with the academic core and the college mission. Even the development of nontraditional community-based programs should maintain a commitment to educational quality without distancing the college from its core mission. Given limited resources at most rural community colleges, durable programs are those that integrate external needs with internal college capacities or that strengthen capacities by reaching out to new client groups. At the heart of successful team building for institutional and community change is the integration of the team's mission with the central mission of the college. Teams must support and enhance, rather than compete with, the core structures and activities of the institution. Successful RCCI colleges have utilized the RCCI process as a tool to revitalize the entire college, as well as a mechanism to build bridges between the college and the external community. A systems approach that enhances institutional capacity while addressing community needs builds a foundation for sustainable change.

## Guidelines for Effective Teams

Be sure all team members understand the team mission.

Select team members for their competence, commitment, and diversity in perspectives.

Promote collaboration and participatory decision-making.

Value informal as well as formal communication.

Adopt communication styles that are clear and acceptable between academic and community members, and across cultures.

Expose team members to new viewpoints and experiences.

Promote a risk-taking culture.

Recognize and develop second-tier leadership.

Understand your cultural context.

Connect with the college mission.

**RCCI**



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